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THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF ENTHUSIASM.

BY GENERAL WILLIAM BOOTH, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE
SALVATION ARMY.

IN ORDER to be understood, I must first of all disclaim acquaintance with any religion but that which consists in following Jesus Christ. Learned and unlearned persons in many lands have taken opportunity to remind me that texts can be found in the New Testament which seem to advocate a hidden religion of the heart which commends itself to them because it can be lived in the midst of a godless world without offending anybody. But with the so-called "Old" Testament, which was the Bible of the Saviour and his apostles, in my hand, I really cannot accept any version of his life or teachings that will not harmonize with the glorious enthusiasm of the Psalms or the conduct of the men who "turned the world upside down." Enthusiasm for Christ is, in fact, first of all valuable in my eyes as a proof that a man really knows him and the power of his resurrection, and possesses some of his spirit of devotion to the salvation of men.

But in writing, as I presume, to practical men,—to men who know how to turn villages into cities, territories into states, and states into stepping-stones to power,—I shall just dwell upon a few of the practical results of enthusiasm as contrasted with ease in connection with religion, which I have myself observed during forty-five years of public labor in the cause of Christ.

Enthusiasm is good for the enthusiast. In endeavoring to promote that most difficult of all objects, the subjection of men to the will of God, one must needs encounter the most chilling and wearying influences at every turn. Merely to aspire to the realization of any considerable results in the religious world is to be the butt of all manner of criticisms and objections, the most painful being the suggestion that some base, selfish motive must be the main-spring of your action. The world has become so sadly unaccustomed to the sight of men leaving all to follow Christ, or putting themselves to any serious trouble on his account, that they are naturally incredulous when they meet with any one who professes to have commenced so extraordinary a life.

Therefore the man who attempts it with a weak and trembling spirit is not likely to persevere. The same man filled with the joy of the Lord, and rushing upon the world with the ardor of a soldier eager for battle, will be far more likely to endure the cross, despising the shame.

How often do we see men and women who have, all their lives, been indifferent or even opposed to religion suddenly reverse their course, declare themselves sorry for the past, and resolve to be godly in the future. If we sent such people out with multiplied cautions, with doubtful looks, and exhortations to be very careful not to be too loud in their professions of devotion to their new master, I venture to say that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, if they did not relapse immediately into their former life, they would, at any rate, become timid, reserved, ineffective servants of God. But we welcome them into his kingdom with a shout as hearty as if they were members of the minority elected to some legislative body. We help them to sing as if they really did believe in Jesus Christ and meant to follow him. We make them understand that we fully rely upon their daring to stand up as public witnesses for him the very next day, and consequently we find the Swede and the German capable of becoming as flaming zealots in his cause as the Hindoo or the Irishman.

On the other hand, what do we see? We are anxious to avoid saying any word that may reflect upon any other followers of the same King. But do not the sermons and speeches of the leading ministers of most churches tell us plainly enough that where the motto, expressed or understood, is "No enthusiasm allowed here," the whole body sinks to a level of indifference that no person is capable of stirring? In one of the leading churches of Scotland, the other day, the chief speaker in one of the discussions now so common about the indifference of the masses to religion, summed up with the remark that the church was perishing through the selfishness and indifference of her own children.

Enthusiasm is valuable in its influence upon the crowd. This will, I think, be so universally admitted that there can be no need to argue it. But, unfortunately, the last thing that many able teachers of religion desire to see is any crowd. They have a notion that, in some way, the excitement of the multitude on the subject of religion must bring with it a profane and irreverent result; as though, in fact, there were a danger of crowding Jesus

Christ himself. Now, the whole story of his three years' ministry shows he had no such dread of the multitude; and it would surely do much to disabuse the gospel of the halo of sanctimonious uselessness that so largely obscures it in our day, if we could only realize the clouds of dust and the buzz of oriental chatter that doubtless proclaimed in his own day the coming of the Son of Man.

It will, I think, be admitted on all hands, that no candidate for the Presidency would stand the faintest chance of election if his foremost advocates contented themselves with the quiet and dignified sort of propaganda that is thought the correct thing by those whose business it is to make the nations awake to the claims of Jesus Christ to universal sovereignty. To win the million, there must be the putting-forth at every turn of such efforts as can only spring from the most enthusiastic partisanship. This is a principle that one would have expected any common-sense nineteenth-century being to be wide awake to. But, alas! alas! Jesus Christ is most sacredly guarded from success by the unaccountable prejudices of the bulk of his own party. Consequently we see the little handfuls resorting weekly to the church, and the huge majority crushing daily into the theatre and the saloon.

The enlightened newspaper of a Christian people and the polished inhabitant of the suburb may sneer at the "cranks" who wear glaring uniforms to show their devotion to the cause of a heavenly candidate, and kneel in snow or mud at the street-corner to pray; but the crowd find an irresistible something about men and women who are manifestly in earnest, and from the saloon, and worse places still, they come in ever-increasing numbers to see what all the racket can be about. We shall yet, by God's help, turn the millions right about face.

Need I say that I regard what has been called the enthusiasm of humanity as one of the most invariably distinctive marks of the true follower of Jesus Christ? When once a man has found in him the one grand source of light and happiness, love to his neighbor must above all demand supreme effort to lead that neighbor to Christ; and this principle, in view of a world determined to forget Christ as much as possible, must needs imply a life-long struggle to lead the crowd to the cross.

As for the theory that those who labor in the world-field for God are not responsible for results, it always seems to me one of the most laughable follies of the age. What would any of the

gentlemen who are so eloquent about "sowing the seed and leaving the results with God" say to a gardener who wished to be kept in their employment upon such terms, and who after, say, three years' patient sowing, complained that it was unreasonable to judge of his work by the absence of any apparent result, and endeavored to persuade his master that the quantity of valuable seed deposited in the ground, though not a sprout had appeared from it, should be considered in itself a matter for congratulation and a guarantee of coming fruitfulness? The coolness with which church after church officially admits its failure and its incompetence to deal with the masses, whilst claiming to be none the less in the divine order, is to me simply astounding.

Not to stir the whole multitude, not to make the name of Jesus Christ in sober reality "high over all," seems to me to mean ruinous failure, and I am more and more confident, the longer I live, that the majority in any land can be thoroughly awakened on the subject of religion wherever there are laborers sufficiently enthusiastic in their devotion to the cause.

The masses are never likely to take particular interest in a religion whose meeting-places remain closed most days of the year and most hours of the exceptional days on which they are utilized. Practical men judge, naturally enough, that the professors of such a religion do not, after all, attach very much importance to it, and that they by no means believe the tremendous things they are accustomed in creeds and songs and prayers to declare.

Enthusiasm is necessary to perseverance in hard work. To overcome the disastrous results of so much religion without enthusiasm; to drive out the strange gods that to-day command the honor and devotion which are due to the one Almighty Saviour, and to disciple all nations for him, demand an amount of self-denying and painstaking effort such as enthusiasts alone can put forth. We have to turn one of the smallest and most insignificant of minorities into a majority, and for such a purpose anything short of desperate activity is absurdly inadequate. But I have proved that an enthusiastic love of Christ is sufficient to constrain persons of every class to take upon themselves the form of servants to mankind and to labor without hope of earthly reward up to the limit of, and too often beyond, their strength.

In an age devoted above all to gain, I have seen many thousands of men and women give up home, friends, situations, and

prospects to become the despised officers of the Salvation Army ; to toil in all seasons and climes day by day for the good of strangers, who have too often been led to return hatred or contempt for their love. More than 8,000 of these are serving with the colors to-day. I have seen ladies nurtured in the lap of comfort perform the most menial services for the vilest of the poor, and delight to go on with such work year after year, because they felt their smallest effort was helping to bring about the triumph of Christ's cause. Enemies of the Salvation Army, no longer able to deny the self-sacrificing and laborious character of our officers' lives, have actually represented them as slaves to myself and my children, as though it were possible for the members of one family to secure and maintain the daily, faithful obedience of thousands of servants recruited from every quarter of the globe, and employed amidst every variety of circumstance from the Hooghly to the Oregon. How is it that, with all the prizes of the world before their eyes, young men can be relied upon amid the snows of Canada or Sweden, the jungles of India and Ceylon, to carry out the same system of daily toil for others, enduring want and suffering only too uncomplainingly rather than even trouble with the story of their perplexities the leaders who are supposed to be so cruel to them ? I say that such lives would be impossible but for the reproduction by the spirit of God in our own day of the very enthusiasm which brought the Saviour from his throne to a manger and from the Mount of Transfiguration to Calvary. If those who sneer at any suggestion of unearthly motive or unearthly power can discover a method of enlisting human activities in the service of the race to a larger extent than has been done in any age by the enthusiasm of the Crucified, I for one would be ready to give their representations every attention. But without enthusiasm one can only expect, in connection with religion, the cold perfunctory service which gains nobody, and sooner or later disgusts and wearies everybody.

Enthusiasm is good for the wretched. How is it that so great a gap generally exists between the representatives of Christianity and those who are in outward or inward misery ? The horrible barrier of caste which separates so widely between the rich and the poor in most countries of Europe will surely not be allowed to extend beyond a few large cities of the United States ; but without this I think it will be admitted that there is a serious

gulf between those who are surrounded with every comfort and the really poor ; between the professors of religion and those who see no good in it. How is this gulf to be bridged ? It appears to me impassable except by enthusiasts.

To a poor fellow who feels himself friendless, whether with regard to this life or to that which is to come, the mere "God bless you" of an ignorant Salvationist, who evidently cares about him, is more valuable than a whole course of lectures from some patronizing friend whose style and manner say : "I would like to assist you, if you will be good enough to keep your distance." Human hearts are marvellously alike, wherever they may be found, and the mere discovery of some one wildly eager to do him good is enough to help many a despairing one into a new world, where there are light and hope.

But enthusiasm is, above all, of value to the rich. We have it upon the highest authority that no class has, after all, so great difficulty in becoming or remaining truly religious as those who have plenty of this world's goods. Surrounded and almost overwhelmed by circumstances calculated to divert the mind from every spiritual consideration, and opposed, whenever they attempt anything like hearty adhesion to the cause of Christ, by their whole circle, it is, indeed, "hard for them that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God." I must honestly confess that I have never known an instance of a rich man who was successful in the attempt, without having first sold all that he had, if not in the literal sense, at least in that of absolutely and completely coming out from his circle to be an avowed and enthusiastic follower of Christ. From John Wesley downwards I believe every great leader in the religious world would agree with me that the wealthy "patron of the society," who expects to wield influence at least in proportion to the extent of his liberality, is one of the greatest hindrances to the church's success. How common is it to find ministers and even churches who confess themselves powerless to carry out the work as they believe they ought, because "it would never do" to offend Squire So-and-So. For the scruples of the Squire I have only discovered one effectual cure ; namely, to get him fired with the very same spirit which made apostolic farmers sell up and go out to die.

How often have we seen wealthy persons approach us with every sign of interest and sympathy only to draw back to a greater

distance than ever ; and the secrets of the process have not been far to seek. These ladies and gentlemen came to a meeting loaded with all the prejudices that multiplied misrepresentation could create. The first half-hour in the presence of a people whose every look and word demonstrated a furious sincerity scattered these prejudices to the winds, and the astonished visitors left the place thoroughly satisfied that we had God's blessing and deserved theirs as well. But the next morning some friend put before them the newspaper rendering of the very meeting they had themselves witnessed, and a few well-directed sneers were sufficient to cause them to withdraw from all appearance of sympathy, or, at best, to write me letters of remonstrance and complaint with regard to matters of mere taste to which, when present, they made no objection. How can such persons ever be emancipated from the chains of custom and the terrors of criticism in any other way than by becoming absorbed with a passionate love for the Great Master and the souls he died to save?

I must confess that I always have looked, and I continue to look, to the American continent and to the colonies for examples of this chivalrous devotion which has become so rare in modern times in the old world. Surely the energies and abilities of the new nations that are growing up across the Atlantic are not going to be absorbed altogether in the construction of railroads, canals, and palaces. Surely in this enlightened age we shall yet see the spectacle of men, possessed of resources of every kind, throwing themselves into the service of God with something like the completeness of devotion common in what are called the dark ages.

Of one thing, at least, I am certain: religious enthusiasm will be indispensable to the endurance of heaven. How I have been puzzled to imagine the meaning that many persons attach to the authorized descriptions of the country in which they hope to spend their eternity ! Multitudes beyond number, bursts of enraptured song, shouts of gladness, and all this forever, for the enjoyment of persons who are ready to grumble if they are asked to remain at ever so quiet a meeting for more than an hour or two ! I really cannot help thinking that heaven will be simply unendurable for those who detest religious enthusiasm. Perhaps they really hope to see the whole race end in the mud. I prefer to live forever, and while I live, to live.

WILLIAM BOOTH.